

Donna Shaver returns to the National Park Service

Sea turtle biologist Donna Shaver returned to the National Park Service in October 2003 following a 10-year stint with the Biological Resources Division (BRD) of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Shaver was transferred to the National Biological Service when it was established in 1993 along with approximately 200 NPS research-grade scientists and support staff and was later folded into USGS-BRD. Her "restoration" is one of just a few transfers of BRD research scientists back to the National Park Service and results from the USGS determination that Shaver's work is now at an applied state that better fits the park mission.

Shaver is the foremost expert on endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles in the United States and a leader in sea turtle biology and recovery. She will continue the sea turtle research, monitoring, and conservation efforts that she helped pioneer at the park more than 20 years ago and continued to perfect while working for the USGS. Starting as a Student Conservation Association research associate in 1980, Shaver worked her way up to research biologist in 1993, and completed her doctorate in biology at Texas A&M University in 2000. Mike Soukup, NPS Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, considered Shaver's return very important in reestablishing the institutional knowledge and expertise of the successful sea turtle restoration program in the National Park Service. Shaver now serves as chief of the Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery at Padre Island National Seashore.



Sea turtle biologist Donna Shaver and former park superintendent Jock Whitworth release green sea turtle hatchlings at Padre Island National Seashore. Let go just 48 hours after hatching, the sea turtles immediately head to the surf, perhaps not to return to the park to nest for 30 years.

Padre Island is the site of a long-term effort to restore a nesting population of Kemp's ridley sea turtles, the most endangered sea turtles in the world. In a grand, international experiment from 1978 to 1988, Mexican biologists collected eggs from the species' primary nesting beach in Rancho Nuevo, Mexico; packed them in Padre Island sand; and shipped them to the national seashore. After hatching in captivity, the young turtles were released in hopes that they would imprint on the park and eventually return to nest. Shaver arrived two years after this project began and has been integral in shaping the course of the restoration since that time. After 10 years of searching, Shaver confirmed in 1996 the first returning Kemp's ridley sea turtles from the experiment. Eggs continue to be collected in Texas and are incubated at a temperature that encourages more females than males, a strat-

egy that she uses to help increase the number of breeding females and better match the natural sex ratio. Although the Kemp's ridley is still considered endangered, the Padre Island population has increased gradually. In 2003 a record 38 Kemp's ridley nests were documented in Texas, including 23 at the national seashore. Additionally, 55% of all Kemp's ridley nests recorded in the United States since 1989 have been at Padre Island National Seashore. The program now involves up to 20 nonpermanent NPS employees and 100 volunteers each year and is of high interest to locals, scientists, environmental groups, government bureaus, and the media. Based on her excellent work, credibility, and partnership building, Shaver has successfully attracted approximately \$2.6 million to the sea turtle program.

Shaver continues to coordinate research and restoration activities with many partners in the United States and Mexico. She is Texas coordinator of the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network, a member of the Kemp's ridley sea turtle working group and the Kemp's ridley recovery team, a board member of the International Sea Turtle Society, and a member of the IUCN (the World Conservation Union) Species Survival Commission—Marine Turtle Specialist Group. The National Park Service is proud to welcome her back. ■